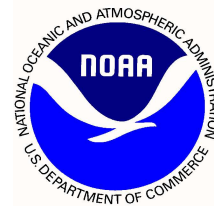


News from your National Weather Service



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FROM THUNDERSTORMS TO WINTER STORMS, FLATHEAD COUNTY HAS BECOME STORMREADY

Editor's Note: The program's name is StormReady (one word, no spacing between)

On October 27, 2004 residents of Flathead County in Northwest Montana will learn how the public and private sectors are teaming together to make their communities and residents better prepared to handle weather-related events or disasters in the future.

NOAA's National Weather Service (NWS) and local officials will unveil special signs designating the county and incorporated cities as "StormReady." The StormReady program gives communities the skills and education needed to survive severe weather, and helps community leaders and emergency managers strengthen their local hazardous weather operations.

"Flathead County attained its StormReady designation on September 22, 2004 from the Western Montana StormReady Advisory Board," said Peter Felsch, Warning Coordination Meteorologist and StormReady Co-Chairman at the NWS Forecast Office in Missoula. "The county and its incorporated cities were approved by a local advisory board made up of emergency management officials for the State of Montana, the Meteorologist-In-Charge and the Warning Coordination Meteorologist at NWS Missoula."

In addition to the county recognition, the following incorporated cities were designated as StormReady: Kalispell, Columbia Falls, and Whitefish.

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“The StormReady program is voluntary, and provides counties and communities with clear-cut weather warning and preparedness advice from a partnership with the local National Weather Service office, and emergency managers from the state and local level,” said Alan Marble, Flathead County Disaster and Emergency Services Coordinator. “The preparedness program uses a grassroots approach to help communities develop plans to handle local severe weather threats from blizzards to tornadoes.”

Six criteria are used to determine whether a county/community is Storm Ready: 24-hour Warning Reception Point & Emergency Operations Center; ability for these centers to receive NWS Warnings; ability to monitor hydrometeorological data, ability to inform the community and special authorities about the weather warnings; public education about severe weather threats and appropriate responses; and formal hazards and risk assessment planning.

“StormReady provides several benefits to our communities. Benefits include improved timeliness and effectiveness of weather warnings to the public, detailed recommendations to help improve hazardous weather operations for local authorities and an “image incentive” to our cities and counties that can identify themselves as being “StormReady,” said Marble. “In fact, for those areas participating in the National Flood Insurance Program, a Storm Ready designation means reduced flood insurance rates.”

The NWS officials will present StormReady certificates and special StormReady signs to Alan Marble, Flathead County Disaster and Emergency Services and the Mayors of the incorporated cities at a special ceremony listed below. The media and community are welcome to attend the ceremony:

**October 27, 2004 in the Flathead County Emergency Operations Center
Kalispell Justice Center ,
920 South Main, at 1030 AM**

**Contact: Alan Marble, Flathead County Disaster and Emergency Services Coordinator
at (406) 758-5560.**

Citing the need to be ready to deal with Nature’s fury, National Weather Service officials revealed that statistics indicate nearly 350 tornadoes have killed three people and damaged numerous communities throughout Montana since 1950.

“These tornadoes have resulted in close to \$130,000 in crop damage and nearly \$41 million in property damage. Additionally, there has been more than 1,600 high wind and severe thunderstorm events documented across the state during this same time,” said Felsch. “It is very important for everyone to understand that flooding, wildland fires and other weather-related events can be a threat to those who live, work or play in our area. You not only should know what conditions bring on these weather events, but what to do when they occur.”

(MORE)

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"The Storm Ready program shows great promise and we hope it will continue its growth here in Montana as well as nationwide," said Felsch. "StormReady helps communities attain a new level of preparedness and mitigation awareness through education, resulting in the protection of life and property from extreme weather-related events. StormReady will also strengthen a community's ability to receive and use severe weather watches and warnings from the National Weather Service."

Martha Smith, District 1 Western Representative of the Montana Emergency Managers Association added her endorsement of the StormReady program. "It's paramount for communities to understand the types of weather-related threats in the area, when they are most likely to occur, and how to prepare in advance for severe weather events. For example, the peak threat for tornadoes in Montana occurs during the summer yet most flooding occurs between mid winter and late spring."

Smith said, "Through the use of the NWS' NOAA Weather Radio broadcasts, we can help save lives during severe weather. These programs are another great example of the federal, state and local agencies helping local emergency managers have a more significant impact on their community."

"NOAA Weather Radios with alarms are the surest way to keep your family informed of hazardous weather," Bruce Bauck, Meteorologist-In-Charge of the NWS in Missoula said. "We encourage everyone to equip their homes, schools, businesses and public places with this lifesaving device. NOAA Weather Radios should be as common as smoke detectors. While 85 to 95 percent of Americans can receive NOAA Weather Radio broadcasts, only five to 10 percent of Americans own a NOAA Weather Radio. Across Montana, there are currently 22 NOAA Weather Radio transmitters covering population centers."

Bauck continued, "While StormReady is designed to prepare communities, the actions of an individual often mean the difference between life and death. Families and individuals need to have an action plan for severe weather events as well as other natural disasters."

Nationally, as of October 1, 2004, there are 404 counties and 348 communities in 47 states that have met the criteria and completed the review process to be officially recognized as StormReady. Montana now has 6 counties and 8 communities designated as StormReady.

For more information about the "StormReady" program please visit <http://www.stormready.noaa.gov>. Each NWS forecast office posts daily forecasts and severe weather warnings on their Web pages. Links to NWS offices across the country are available through <http://weather.gov>. Learn more about NOAA Weather Radio at <http://205.156.54.206/nwr/nwrhome.html>

(MORE)

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Editor's Notes:

An image of the "StormReady" sign is also available to use with this story at <http://www.stormready.noaa.gov>

If you have questions, please call one of the coordinators listed above or Peter Felsch (National Weather Service) (406) 329-4715 or write to the National Weather Service, 5765 Highway 10 West Missoula, MT 59803

The following is a complete listing of the 6 Montana Counties and 8 communities that are National Weather Service "StormReady" designated as of October 1, 2004

Flathead County: Kalispell, Columbia Falls and Whitefish

Lewis and Clark County: Helena

Gallatin County: Bozeman

Yellowstone County: Billings

Custer County

Fallen County

Communities: Glasgow and Dillon